



That summer I was working nights at Talulah's to pay the rent until school opened again in the fall. It was Wednesday night, getting on time to close, and there was one woman left, nursing a beer over in the corner under the bass speaker. She was small, Asian-dark, her dusty black hair cut in spikes and not an ounce of fat on her, but not frail, definitely not frail.

I had to ask her to move her feet so I could get the mop under the table.

"My name's Nadia," she said, "and I'm a National Treasure."

National Treasure. That was a new one on me. "Right," I said, because the customer always is.

She moved her legs, anyhow. And finished off her beer. Then she looked around as if she hadn't seen the place before. It was hard to tell what she thought of it. Talulah's is better than some places, worse than others. I've seen plenty of women's bars, though, and I like this one. On nights when I'm here as a paying customer and the women are high-stepping, flashing lean muscle and white teeth, and the floor almost

moves with the weight of the music, it's a fine place, a place of possibility and excitement. But now, with the music down low, and the people paired off and gone, the harsh overhead light showed puddles of spilled beer on the floor and stains on the wall.

"Thursdays are the best," I offered, leaning on my mop. "And of course, I'll be here then." I gave her my best smile.

That's when she pushed back her chair and looked at me. Her eyes were very dark brown. Black maybe. "How do you do that?"

"What?"

"Trust a stranger. You shouldn't."

"It's never done me any harm."

Her smile was strange, twisty and self-mocking. "I do believe you mean that. You trust me." She said it slowly, as though she was tasting it. Then she nodded once, sharply. "Trust for trust then. But when the time comes, just make sure my guards don't see you talking to me."

Drugs, I thought, but she didn't look like she used. Too healthy. "Guards?"

Directory giving details of no less than 69 magazines. It's good useful stuff, though there's an undertone which says if you like anything other than cutting-edge speculative fiction you're a real lobotomy case. Duhh... To sum up, BBR isn't your typical f&sf mag. It concentrates on contemporary Dark Fantasy with not a lot of plot or protagonists to root for. This makes it hard work to read, but I'm sure there are dozens of people who'll love it.

BBR: A4, 84 pages, every six months. £3.50 per issue or £11 for a four-issue sub from BBR, PO Box 625, Sheffield, S1 3GY.

Xenos calls itself a Literary Science Fiction/Fantasy Forum Magazine, at which point I narrowed my eyes. Issue 15 is an A5 typeset 72-pager with a white glossy cover. The pictures are scant, but the fiction looks substantial and the "forum" section is small and tucked way back.

The mag kicks off with "Love Story" by David Leicester, set in a future where you can always get a clone made up to replace a dead hubby or wife. Trouble is, the clones aren't quite as good as the real thing, so our hero does it the other way round and fixes up the woman of his dreams with his (illicit) clone first. Well, it isn't quite like that, but I don't want to spoil it. Next is another good one, Giles Dorrington's "The Condor, the Snake, and the Human Being." The latter will be a clue to the Commanches amongst you that this is a Red Indian story. It's interesting, about a spyr old chief waiting for a spirit bird to carry him away. I didn't know that Red Indians, oh go on then, Native Americans, carried their shrivelled up umbilical cords in a little leather pouch round their necks. Then there's "Red Sails In The Sunset," about a robot barge skipper on an abandoned earth who breaks through the strictures of his programming, then hires himself a metallic crew. I liked this story too.

Sparing you a blow-by-blow account, then came a vampire, an anaconda and a salamander man, a diplodocoid, and true essence of Paris plus other travel spots. I quite liked them all. Oh, last comes that forum section, giving snippets of opinion about the previous issue. But you don't have to bother with it. In summary, Xenos is OK, giving you seven stories all nicely plotted, written and told. It's perhaps a tad pricey and a little staid, but it's patently a stayer and is well worth a whirl.

XENOS: A5, 72 pages. £3.45 per issue or £19.50 for an annual six-issue sub. Available and cheques payable to Xenos, 29 Prebend Street, Bedford, MK40 1QN.

Finally I wanted to mention **Focus**. This isn't that defunct little BSFA pamphlet, but a new glossy top-of-the-

shop popular science mag available in newsagents. It reminded me of *Scientific American*, but is pitched more towards your average Joe. Issue 1 is fat and colourful, with a ten-page special on dinosaurs, an article called "Doomsday Asteroid Alert," stuff about racing cars and our British world-beating technology, and a lot else. Such as the "Update" round-up covering solids that are lighter than air, Magneto-HydroDynamic 100-knot ships, modern-day mummification, and so on. There are also incredible crystal cave pictures, a gene therapy article, an interview with Arthur C. Clarke, UV and IR headlights from SAAB, and much much more. It's a beautiful magazine. Buy it. For your future, and for your children.

The World in FOCUS: as advertised on TV, £1.75 for 96 pages, monthly. Also available at £21 for an annual subscription from G+J, Portland House, Stag Place, London SW1E 5AU. Phone 0858 468888 for overseas rates.

(John Duffield)

Everyone Gets the Razor

Andy Robertson

Despite the unbanning of their novel *Lord Horror*, those fabulous sweeties from Savoy Books are still in trouble. This time comics about Horror's side-kicks **Meng & Ecker** (Savoy, £1.50) are up for burning. We have received issue 5 which, in response to all the official hassling, concentrates on lampooning the ex-Chief Constable of Manchester, James "God's Cop" Anderton. It is obscene and deeply irreverent, the funniest thing I've read in ages. Kris Guido's artwork (by-Howarth-out-of-Misha, but rougher) exactly complements Dave Britton's script, and the whole thing shows terrific wit and style.

Be warned, though: Savoy's stuff is a bit strong for some tastes, and everyone, from nuns through Pakistani shop-keepers to gay AIDS activists, gets the razor. Because of this they have come in for criticism from all across the political spectrum.

They also sent us a rather fine one-off called **Monoshock** (Savoy, £1.50), and a CD which I couldn't play because baby Alice has jammed the machine with her sticky little fingers. And they sent us about 50 press releases which I haven't got round to sorting into order, let alone reading. According to the one on the top of the pile (August 1992) Savoy's comic titles are in danger of confiscation and destruction, so if you think you can help them contact editor Michael Butterworth, 279 Deansgate, Manchester.

And two more comics (sorry, graphic novels) from the new Gollancz line. Ian Macdonald and David Lyttleton's **KLING KLANG KLATCH** (Gollancz, £9.99) is a sort of film noir set in a world populated by animated children's toys – teddy bears, transformers, Barbie dolls – with real flesh-blood-and-guts inside the fur and morals to match. It's a ridiculous idea, but the book balances the essential silliness of the scenario against the horrific living-doll images it can conjure up, and does it rather well.

Unfortunately, the authors lose their nerve and introduce themselves into the storyline in a couple of unnecessary metafictional longeurs (I wish people wouldn't do this: it's not clever, it's merely precious). But overall this is a successful work, demonstrating the power of the medium. I don't think you could have made it believable as an ordinary novel. High marks to Macdonald for the script, and to Lyttleton for the clever semi-naturalistic artwork.

Al Davison's **The Minotaur's Tale** (Gollancz, £9.99) is beautifully drawn but rather less well plotted. Davison is particularly good on the human figure: his female nudes look for once as if they are made of flesh, not lycra, and he manages to disprove the rule that the quality of a strip is inversely proportional to the amount of tit it contains. But, despite attempting some profound themes, the storyline is dangerously thin, and suffers from unemployed-militant-lesbian-black-exjunkie-AIDS-survivor-singlemother-itis to an almost comical extent. This is a book worth looking at, but excellent artwork does not by itself a graphic novel make.

The secret of life was worked out, on pure cybernetic principles, by John Von Neumann, about 40 years ago. And quite soon after that his ideas were confirmed by the discovery of DNA. I assume that everybody knows this already? Right? Because if so, there's really no need to read **Artificial Life** by Steven Levy (Cape, £16.99), a book which makes a tremendous fuss trying to hide the fact that we have made no real progress since then.

But just to summarize: we know that DNA-life is a self-replicating machine, exactly embodying, in its genes and proteins, the basic structural elements that Von Neumann predicted self-replicating machines should have. It follows that there's nothing special about DNA-life, and that an infinite range of other classes of Von Neumann machines – other sorts of "life" – may be possible. Hence the possibility of alien life, artificial life, non-carbon life, mechanical life, you name it. From this belief has come a host of speculative and science-fictional ideas, from Moore's artificial plants right down to nanotechnology. But nothing has been